

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

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FM AMEMBASSY MASERU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4619

INFO AMEMBASSY GABORONE

AMEMBASSY MBABANE

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

AMCONSUL DURBAN

AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

C O N F I D E N T I A L MASERU 66

CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, LT, SF

SUBJECT: LESOTHO MINER UNREST

REF: A. MASERU 35; B. JOHANNESBURG 47; C. STATE 7458

1. SUMMARY: LESOTHO GOVERNMENT HAS NOT MADE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS IN EASING CONCERNS OF MINERS OVER MANDATORY DEFERRED PAY PLAN. PROTEST AGAINST PLAN PROBABLY NOW AT LEAST AS MUCH POLITICAL AS ECONOMIC AND JONATHAN SEEMS TO BE REACHING BY PLACING BLAME ON SOUTH AFRICA FOR MINE DISTURBANCES AND HOSTILITY TO PAY PLAN. DESPITE MEASURE'S UNPOPULARITY IT UNLIKELY TO BE RETRACTED AND LESOTHO'S MINERS WILL HAVE TO LEARN TO LIVE WITH IT IF THEY WANT TO WORK. END SUMMARY.

1. IN WEEK THAT HAS PASSED SINCE REPORT REFTEL A, GOL HAS CONTINUED EFFORTS TO PERSUADE LESOTHO MINERS THAT DEFERRED PAY PLAN IN THEIR BEST INTEREST. MINER DELEGATION VISITED LESOTHO EARLY IN WEEK OF JAN 13 FOR TALKS WITH PRIME MINISTER BUT
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DISCUSSIONS APPARENTLY INCONCLUSIVE. PRIME MINISTER JONATHAN,

COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY MINISTER MOITSE, AND OTHERS HAVE BEEN FOUNTAINS OF INFORMATION ON DEFERRED PAY PLAN BUT SEEM TO HAVE GLOSSED OVER CONTENTIOUS POINTS WITH ASSURANCES THAT DISTORT PLAN'S ACTUAL OPERATION.

2. IT BECOMING INCREASINGLY CLEAR THAT MUCH OF OPPOSITION TO DEFERRED PAY SCHEME RESULTS FROM CONCERN ABOUT CONTROL THAT GOL AND GOVERNMENT-RUN LESOTHO BANK WILL HAVE OVER MINERS' MONEY. MANY MINERS BY NOW UNDERSTAND DEFERRED PAY PLAN WELL ENOUGH BUT ARE SIMPLY OPPOSED TO GOL'S ROLE. SOME RETURNING MINERS HAVE PUT IT THAT THEY DO NOT WANT TO MAKE MORE MONEY AVAILABLE TO GOL TO BUY AMMUNITION TO SHOOT THEM AND THEIR FAMILIES LATER.

3. JONATHAN NOW SEEMS TO REALIZE THAT MUCH OF OPPOSITION TO DEFERRED PAY PLAN IS SUBSTANTIALLY POLITICAL AND HIS MOST RECENT STATEMENTS HAVE BEEN GIVEN OVER TO ANTI-SOUTH AFRICAN BLUSTER AS IF TO IDENTIFY A COMMON ENEMY. HE AND MOITSE HAVE DENOUNCED CAPITALIST SYSTEM THAT EXPLOITS MINERS, HAVE STATED HOW MUCH THEY ARE TRYING TO DO TO END INEQUITIES OF MINE LABOR, AND HAVE BLAMED SOUTH AFRICAN MINE MANAGEMENT FOR MISINFORMING MINERS FROM LESOTHO ABOUT PAY PLAN AND THEREBY ENCOURAGING VIOLENCE THAT OCCURRED.

4. DO NOT ANTICIPATE MINERS' PROTESTS WILL FADE AWAY RAPIDLY. MOST RETURNING MINERS (ABOUT 8,000 TO DATE) KNOW THEY NOT AFFECTED BY DEFERRED PAY PLAN UNTIL THEY SIGN NEW CONTRACTS AND SOME APPARENTLY CAME HOME ONLY TO SHOW DISPLEASURE WITH GOVERNMENT'S SCHEME. MOST OF REMAINDER SEEM TO HAVE BEEN LED ALONG BY STRONGLY ANTI-GOVERNMENT AGITATORS WHO PLAYED ON THIS MISCONCEPTIONS AND DOUBTS. ROLE OF MORE POLITICALLY ACTIVE LESOTHO MINERS APPARENTLY OF INCREASING CONCERN TO MINE MANAGEMENT. FIRST SOLID EVIDENCE OF THIS CONCERN IS OUTRIGHT FIRING OF 2400 FROM ANGLO-AMERICANS PRESIDENT BRAND MINE REPORTED REFTEL B. TO BEST OUR KNOWLEDGE, THIS IS FIRST TIME MINERS FROM LESOTHO HAVE BEEN SACKED IN A GROUP.

5. RE REFTEL C, MOST OF INFORMATION PASSED BY KONKA MOLAPO APPEARS ERRONEOUS. NEITHER MINISTER MOITSE NOR SIKHONYANA HAS VISITED MINES DURING PRESENT ROUND OF DISTURBANCES. WE CONFIDENTIAL

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DO UNDERSTAND, HOWEVER, THAT TWO MINOR GOL LABOR OFFICIALS BASED IN JOHANNESBURG HAVE VISITED MINE SITES AND HAVE ENCOUNTERED ROUGH TREATMENT AT LEAST TWICE. RE SCHUMAN MESSAGE TO JONATHAN, WORD WAS PASSED THAT CONTINUED TROUBLE FROM LESOTHO MINERS MIGHT BE GROUNDS FOR SUSPENDING HIRING IN LESOTHO. JONATHAN APPARENTLY REPLIED SUSPENSION WOULD BE A HOSTILE ACT. HIRING OF MINERS HAS NOT CEASED HERE; ONE MAJOR RECRUITING ORGANIZATION SIGNED ON 3000 LAST WEEK AND

EXPECTS 3000 THIS WORK. IN JAN 1974, HOWEVER, 12,000 WERE SIGNED IN EACH OF FEW WEEKS FOLLOWING CHRISTMAS SHARP DOWN-TURN IN RECRUITMENT THIS YEAR IS ATTRIBUTED BY RECRUITERS TO OPPOSITION TO DEFERRED PAY PLAN.

6. WE VIEW MOLAPO'S COMMENTS REPORTED PARA 2 REFTEL C AS NONSENSE. SOUTH AFRICA HAS MUCH TO LOSE FROM MINE UNREST, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW OF CURRENT GENERAL MINE LABOR SHORTAGE. BLAMING SOUTH AFRICA FOR EVERYTHING THAT GOES WRONG IS ONE OF JONATHAN'S MORE CONSTANT THEMES. WE EXPECT TO HEAR MORE OF THE SAME UNTIL MINERS GIVE UP, ACCEPT MANDATORY DEFERRED PAY PLAN, AND GO BACK TO WORK.

7. IT REMAINS DOUBTFUL THAT JONATHAN WILL RETRACT DEFERRED PAY PLAN, ESPECIALLY AS IT ENACTED BY INTERIM NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. LESOTHO'S MINERS WILL HAVE TO ACCEPT IT IF THEY WISH EMPLOYMENT AS OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR THEM IN LESOTHO ARE PRACTICALLY NON-EXISTENT. THEY ARE EXPECTED GRADUALLY TO RESUME THEIR FORMER NUMBERS ON SOUTH AFRICAN MINES ALTHOUGH SHORT-TERM PROSPECTS ARE FOR LESS THAN THE NORMAL NUMBER WITH, OF COURSE, DIMINISHED INCOME FOR LESOTHO. IRONICALLY, WHILE GOL IS CURRENTLY CASTIGATING CONTRACT LABOR SYSTEM, IT HAS TAKEN ON VESTED INTEREST IN SYSTEM'S CONTINUATION BY DEVISING MEANS TO PROFIT FROM DEFERRED PAY SCHEME.
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